

*Bamidbar*      May 27, 2017

וַיֹּאֲלֶה תּוֹלְדֹת אֶהֱרֹן, וּמִשֶׁה: בְּיוֹם, דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶת-מִשְׁה--בְּהַר סִינַי. וַיֹּאֲלֶה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי-אֶהֱרֹן,  
הַבְּכֹר נָדָב, וְאַבְיָהוּא, אֶלְעָזָר וְאִיתָמָר

Numbers 3:1-2 *And, these are the generations of Aaron and Moses. In the days that Adonai spoke to Moses at Mt. Sinai, these were the sons of Aaron: Nadav the first-born and Avihu, Elazar and Itamar.*



Image: Shutterstock.com

The first ten chapters of *Bamidbar* describe the organization of the final Israelite encampment at Sinai. Chapter three begins the listing of the names and duties of the Levite clans. Though verse 3:1 references the generations of Aaron and Moses, the verse that follows only mentions Aaron's sons. Yet we know from Exodus 18:3-4 that Moses also had two sons, Gershom (called by his name in Exodus) and Eleazar (called by his name in Chronicles). Why then does the Torah only refer to Aaron's progeny?

Talmud *Sanhedrin* 19b relates that a person who teaches the Torah to another's son is considered as his own father, using as proof Numbers 3:1. Yes, Aaron may have fathered the boys, our sages tell us, but Moses taught them, and therefore, the Talmud teaches, the verse opens with Moses' name as a co-parent of Aaron's four sons. This week's reading underscores a core Jewish value across the ages: education.

Today, Israel reports that approximately 95% of its youth graduate from high-school, making it one of the most educated nations in the world. Further, Israel ranks second among Organization for Economic and Cooperative Development (OECD) countries for adults who have acquired a post secondary (or higher) education. The low cost of university education contributes to these statistics. Students pay less than \$3000 annually for public university tuition and under \$10,000 for private universities. The mean instructional time from primary through lower secondary education in Israel exceeds the OECD average by 1100 more hours.<sup>[1]</sup> Educational achievements for both Jewish and Arab students highlights the success of the Israeli model. In 2006 Israeli students were ranked 31st in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and by 2012 had climbed to 18th. Similarly, the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) showed students improving from the 24th spot in 2007 to 7th in 2012.<sup>[2]</sup> Israel is ranked number one in tertiary education completion for adults aged 55-64, indicating that nearly

50% of these older adults have a four year certificate, degree, or diploma. For adults aged 25 - 34 with tertiary degrees, Israel ranks number 10 in the world.

Israel is a signatory of the Convention against Discrimination in Education, ratified by the United Nations Educational, Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1961. The convention holds the status of law in Israeli courts. The Ministry of Education works to address inequities and provide exceptional schooling for all Israeli children, though they face challenges with geographic barriers (outlying towns with fewer teachers and resources). The Economics and Budgeting Administration reports that in the last 15 years the number of students in Israel grew by just over 23%, while the budget allocated for education in Israel increased by 41%. Yet still, non-Jewish students continue to score significantly lower in testing, a result of less funding for non-Jewish schools, barriers because of the language of the tests, and higher dropout rates than their Jewish counterparts.

Despite this obvious national commitment to education and the tradition of admiration attitudes toward the teaching profession, a recent study indicated only 8% of Israeli parents hope that their children will follow that professional path. Their reasons are obvious: after 15 years of teaching, the average teacher's salary is only 70% of the average salary of teachers in other OECD nations. It is predicted that this wage gap will yield a shortage of 7,700 teachers by 2018.

Individuals and lobby groups continually push Israel's government to provide equitable funding for education. The most recent success is the pledge of a five-year funding plan to increase Arab school budgets. Despite all the challenges within the State, the administration and non-government organizations continue to work to maintain Israel's legacy of high standards and regard for study.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

Is it inevitable that industrialized, democratic countries, like our own and Israel, does not value through remuneration those in the teaching profession? What can and should Israel do to attract more young people to teaching careers?

Where should Israel be spending money in education? There are four "streams" of schooling in Israel: secular state schooling (*Mamlachti*), religious-state (*Mamlachti dati*), independent schools (*Chinuch Atzmai* – which are primarily ultra-orthodox), and Arab. Should allocations be equal? [As it stands, religious schools get 75% of what is given to secular schools and independent are given 30%].

Discuss creative solutions to Israel's imminent teacher shortage. Perhaps a Teach for America program could work for Israel; graduating college students with a working knowledge of Hebrew could volunteer for two years in Israeli schools, and in return the government would pay for advanced degrees pursued in Israel.

#### **Additional References:**

[YNet News 9-12-12](#) Israel is second-most educated country  
[Israel's Ministry of Education](#) - facts and figures

---

[1] <http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/EDIF%202014--N22%20%28eng%29.pdf>

[2] <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4318453,00.html>